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TITLE: METHOD AND MEANS FOR FILLING NATURAL
 CASING SAUSAGES

THIS APPLICATION IS BASED UPON THE APPLICANTS' PROVISIONAL APPLICATION SERIAL NO. 60/127,770 FILED APRIL 5, 1999.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Sausages have been traditionally made by filling the natural intestines of sheep, for example, with the sausage meat product whereupon the filled natural casing was formed into links for cooking by the consumer. In more modern times, sausages are predominantly made by introducing a meat emulsion into an artificial casing which encased the sausage material through linking and preliminary cooking whereupon the casings are peeled from the sausage before being sold to the consumer. Machines for making sausages with artificial casings have a high volume capability (up to 30,000 sausages per hour). Efforts have been made to use these high speed machines with natural casings. However, because of the nature of the natural casings including their relatively shorter length and non-uniform diameter, modern sausage encasing machines have not achieved the volume and capacity with natural casings as they do with artificial casings.

It is therefore a principal object of this invention to provide a method and machine for filling natural casings which is economical, relatively fast, and easy to accomplish as compared to previous ways of filling natural casings.

A still further object of this invention is to provide a method and a machine for filling natural casings wherein the meat pressure expands the natural casing and pushes the casing forward as the

meat emulsion discharges from a conventional hollow stuffing horn.

A further object of this invention is to provide a machine and method for filling a natural casing wherein the filled casing passes through a hollow chuck with a resilient brake therein which impedes the movement of the casing from the stuffer tube and wherein the resilient brake creates a balance between the meat pushing forward on the casing and the brake holding back on the casing, all to create the desired fill or plumpness of the resulting sausage.

A still further object of this invention is to provide a flexible or resilient brake in a hollow chuck through which the filled casing moves in a rotatable twisting head which not only produces a longitudinal drag on the casing to resist forward motion thereof, but also provides a radial rotating course which helps to rotate the casing and thereupon facilitate twisting thereof as the filled sausage casing moves through the linking chains.

A still further object of this invention is to provide a follower or thrust collar on the stuffing tube upstream of the natural casing which is manually and intermittently pushed against the back side of the natural casing which provides a light force to prevent the natural casing from sticking to the tube but does not serve to move the natural casing from the tube, for this is accomplished by the momentum of the meat emulsion filling the casing. This force is insufficient to cause squeezing pressure between the follower and the twisting head.

A still further object of this invention is to provide a method and machine which will permit easy conversion of the machine from the natural casing operation to the artificial casing operation.

A still further object of the invention is to provide a casing clamp and casing hopper on a sausage making machine which can be moved away from the casing filling station at times to accommodate the natural casing mode for the machine.

A still further object of the invention is to provide a method and apparatus for filling a natural casing which has the ability to change the stuffing tube from a full stroke as with artificial casings to a partial stroke for use with natural casings.

A still further object of the invention is to provide a method and machine for filling natural casings which has a thrust collar that can be manually controlled by the operator, or an automatic follower which will duplicate the manual operation by providing a series of intermittent push and release actions to move the unshirred casing forward.

A still further object of the invention is to provide a method and machine to fill natural casings wherein water is present at various stages of the operation to keep the natural casing from becoming dehydrated and to maintain its very soft, pliable and slippery character.

A still further object of the invention is to provide a method and machine for filling natural casings which utilizes a cooling turban as a part of the rotating twister.

These and other objects will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A method of filling a natural hollow elongated casing with meat emulsion involves placing a natural casing on an elongated meat emulsion stuffing tube having a meat emulsion discharge end, closing an extended end of the natural casing over the discharge end of the stuffing tube so that meat emulsion exiting the discharge end will push the natural casing longitudinally by pumping meat emulsion through the stuffing tube for expansive discharge into the natural casing at a sufficient volume and velocity to provide the primary energy within the natural casing to move the natural casing forwardly off of the discharge end of the stuffing tube. The casing is extended through a hollow chuck. A resilient brake element in the chuck is extended around the casing to impede its longitudinal movement. A thrust collar is slidably mounted on the stuffing tube and is intermittently manually pushed against the casing to limit the length thereof but is insufficient to create compression pressure thereon.

An apparatus for filling meat emulsion into an elongated natural or artificial casing has (a) a casing filling station including a stuffing tube for supporting a casing to be filled with meat emulsion, (b) a casing hopper to serve as a reservoir for a plurality of shirred artificial casings mounted on the machine adjacent the casing filling station for delivery of shirred artificial casings for mounting on the stuffing tube, and (c) means on the machine for moving the casing hopper away from its position adjacent the casing filling station when natural

casings are placed on a stuffing tube in the casing filling station.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a prior art sausage encasing machine which shows the general relationship of the major components of the sausage making machine of this invention;

Fig. 2 is an enlarged scale perspective view of the prior art machine of Fig. 1 taken on line 2-2 of Fig. 1;

Figs. 2A and 2B show the casing hopper of Fig. 2 in forward and rearward positions, respectively;

Fig. 3 is an enlarged scale perspective view of the machine of Fig. 2 using conventional shirred casings;

Figs. 3A and 3B are enlarged scale perspective views of the conventional components of a sausage encasing machine after the natural casing is placed on the stuffing horn;

Fig. 4 is an enlarged scale sectional view of the chuck; and

Fig. 5 is a view similar to Fig. 5 during the casing filling process.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A sausage encasing machine 10 (Fig. 1) has a frame 12, and a conventional meat emulsion pump 14 connected to a source of meat emulsion. A stuffing horn 16 is slidably and operably connected to the pump 14 and is longitudinally moveable by air piston 17 contained in housing 18 (Fig. 1). A follower rod 20 is also slidably mounted on the pump 14 parallel to horn 16 and has an actuator 22 on one end slidably mounted on horn 16. Follower rod 20 is

powered by air piston 24 located in housing 18. An elongated shirred sausage casing 26 is conventionally mounted on horn 16. The forward end of horn 16 conventionally terminates at casing filling station 27 (Fig. 3) adjacent twister housing 28 which has a hollow rotatable chuck 29 which receives a meat filled casing 26 and rotates it before the meat filled casing moves into conventional linker 30. (Fig. 4, 5). The chains 31 of linker 30 are rotated by a motor 34 through suitable shafts, gears or belts. The conventional chuck 120 (Figs. 4, 5) in housing 28 is rotated by a motor (not shown) through suitable shafts and gears. Linker 30 is positioned within housing 36 (Fig. 1). The foregoing components are all conventional and are well known in the art, (see U.S. Patent No. 3,115,668) and are controlled by computer control 38 (Fig. 1).

The completed strand of sausages 40 exits the machine 10 through horn 42 and the strand is deposited on the chain of hooks of conventional conveyor 44 (Fig. 1).

A casing hopper 46 has tapered sidewalls 48 and a sloping bottom 50 (Fig. 2) which cause shirred casings 26 therein to migrate downwardly towards a bottom opening 52. Hopper 46 is pivoted at 54 (Fig. 2) to any convenient side supports 56. It is also mounted on plate 58 which is pivotally mounted on plate 60 on a vertical axis of pin 61 to be rotated from the forward aperture position of Fig. 2A for filling shirred casings to an inoperative rearward position of Fig. 2B when not in use. A removable lock pin 62 extends between plates 58 and 60 to selectively lock hopper 46 in a forward or rearward position. A PLC 66 is mounted on machine 10 to program and coordinate the components of the

machine. The PLC will control the pump 14, the rotation and longitudinal movement of horn 16, the position of hopper 46, and the operation of chuck 120, linker 30 and conveyor 44. A sensor or stop 67 (Figs. 3-5) adjacent the twister 28 will cause the functions at the filling station 27 to cease when the casing 220 is filled.

A rotatable chuck 100 (Figs. 5 and 6) has a cylindrical body portion 120 with a longitudinal center bore 140. A resilient brake element 160 is deposited within the center portion of bore 140. The brake 160 has a center bore 180 through which the stuffing horn 16 extends with a natural casing 220 thereon. The brake 160 provides a longitudinal drag on the natural casing as described heretofore. The location of the brake 160 in the chuck 100 can vary from one end to the other. It can be integral with the cylindrical housing 120, or can be of a separate material that is affixed in any convenient manner to the interior center bore of the chuck. The friction applied to the natural casing by the brake 160 merely impedes the free flow of the natural casing from the surface of the stuffing tube, but is insufficient to prevent the movement of the natural casing from the stuffing tube provided by the energy of the meat emulsion discharged from the stuffing tube into the interior of the natural casing.

When it is desired to change the machine 10 from filling conventional shirred casings to the filling of natural casings, the lock pin 62 is released and the hopper 46 is rotated about pin 61 from the forward position of Fig. 2B to the inoperative position of Fig. 2A so that it is out of the way for the process of filling natural casings. The thrust collar 200 is slidably mounted on the

stuffing tube 16 (Figs. 3 and 4) behind the natural casing 220. The collar 200 is intermittently manually or automatically pushed against the casing insufficiently to create squeezing or compression pressure thereon but to facilitate the normal forward movement of the casing on the stuffing tube beyond the normal movement of the casing caused by the energy of the emulsion entering the casing. The longitudinal displacement of tube 16 is typically shortened by the PLC 66 when natural casings are being filled. The hopper 46 can be mechanically lifted, hinged, or moved by sliding to move out of the way to facilitate the process for filling the natural casings.

It is therefore seen that this machine will achieve at least all of its stated objectives.